New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1953

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1953 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumns

1952 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
*Bernardine	231
*Children's Hour (The)	151
*Deep Blue Sea (The)	207
*Dial M for Murder	215
*Evening with Beatrice Lillie (An)	254
*Male Animal (The)	297
Mrs. McThing	359
My Darlin' Aida	218
*New Faces of 1952	278
*Pal Joey	398
*Seven Year Itch (The)	186
*Time of the Cuckoo (The)	235
*Time Out for Ginger	177
*Two's Company	157
Whistler's Grandmother	160
*Wish You Were Here	266

1951 Vol.

*Fourposter (The)	190
*King and I (The)	304
*Moon Is Blue (The)	322

1950 Vol.

*Guys and Dolls	185

1949 Vol.

*South Pacific	312

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 26, 1953*

1953 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1953

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
*Bat (The)	390
Be Your Age	397
*Crucible (The)	383
*Fifth Season (The)	380
*Love of Four Colonels (The)	394
*Mid-Summer	386

Theatre Openings

"The Bat" "The Crucible"
"Mid-Summer" "The Fifth Season"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 26, 1953*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Fifth Season"

The New York Times

January 24, 1953

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In order to enjoy Menasha Skulnik, a theatregoer has to be resigned to seeing a make-shift play. Mr. Skulnik is a funny low comedian who has kept Second Avenue in good humor for a number of years. He is short and plumpish; his hair is moodily receding. To mention another big asset in a low comedian: he looks sorrowful. Being used to disaster, he expects calamity and is braced to sustain it. There are not many things in life more enjoyable than a melancholy Jewish comedian.

Mr. Skulnik has moved uptown into the English-speaking belt with a thick accent, sad eyes, shrugging shoulders and a perfect sense of comedy. In Sylvia Regan's "The Fifth Season," which opened at the Cort last evening, he and Richard Whorf are partners in a Seventh Avenue dress factory and never more than a step or two ahead of the sheriff.

* * *

Thanks to Mr. Skulnik's disenchantment and Mr. Whorf's capacity for suffering in a more highly educated vein, "The Fifth Season" is an entertaining piece of merchandise. While Mr. Whorf goes to the dogs, Mr. Skulnik wrestles with the normal disasters of business as depicted on the stage, and buries himself in a cloud of comic gloom.

Since Miss Regan has to write a play that will come out even at the end, you must expect a scene of sentiment here, a moral lesson there and quite a lot of stage hokum. Some of "The Fifth Season" is uplifting in an off-hand way. For instance, Mr. Whorf's remorse when he realizes how deeply he has hurt his wife: it is elevating.

When these moments of catharsis triumph over the dress business in the "The Fifth Season," you have only to wait patiently for Phyllis Hill, Nita Talbot, Lois Wheeler and Augusta Roeland to appear, looking very handsome in Edythe Gilfond's costumes, or you can wait for the Seventh Avenue sirens to model the latest numbers in the Goodwin-Pincus lines. They explain why the dress business is so fascinating to men.

* * *

Gregory Ratoff has directed a lively performance. Sam Leve has designed a vivid setting. Amid Mr. Leve's modernistic décor, Mr. Skulnik, who makes every second and gesture count, is very lovable and funny. He belongs to an honorable tradition of clowning; he is worthy of his predecessors who knew how to make something comic out of pain. Incidentally it is a novelty and a pleasure to see a play with a happy ending. Even Mr. Skulnik manages a cautious grin for the scene of love and solvency at the final curtain.

"THE FIFTH SEASON"

Comedy by Sylvia Regan; staged by Gregory Ratoff; setting by Sam Leve; costume supervision by Edythe Gilfond; presented by George Kondolf at the Cort Theatre, January 23, 1953. The cast:

Ruby D. Prince.....John Kullers
Shelly.....Nita Talbot
Lorraine McKay.....Phyllis Hill
Ferelli.....Norman Rose
Max Pincus.....Menasha Skulnik
Johnny Goodwin..Richard Whorf
Frances Goodwin.....
Augusta Roeland
Marty Goodwin...Dick Kallman
Miriam Oppenheim.....
Lois Wheeler
Dolores.....Dorian Leigh
Redhead Model.....Midge Ware
Brunette Model...Carolyn Block
Miles Lewis.....John Griggs

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

January 24, 1953

'The Fifth Season'

By WALTER F. KERR

IT SEEMS that there are five seasons in the garment industry—spring, summer, winter, fall, and slack—and Sylvia Regan has now written a play about the lot of them. The season she has reckoned without, though, is the theatrical season, a period from October to May during which the work done on Broadway is expected to be professional.

The new farce at the Cort is the sort of thing which may prove irresistible to out-of-town buyers eager to hear the lingo of the trade immortalized in our living literature, to those who collapse at the most casual mention of a call girl or a size 12. From any other point of view, unfortunately, "The Fifth Season" is an amateur and old-hat rehash of a single intramural joke: the fact that a firm's irate creditors are about to strip the paneling off the office walls.

What is doubly unfortunate about this mild and hackneyed mishap is its waste of a genuinely endearing comedian. Menasha Skulnik, who has been delighting audiences in Yiddish musicals for some twenty years, is here cast as the harried partner of an insolvent and overammbitious dress manufacturer, a forlorn little figure who thinks the nicest thing he can do for his favorite employees is to 'fire them altogether.'

Whether Mr. Skulnik has been touching up his own material ,or whether it is all Miss Regan's and just sounds better when Mr. Skulnik is joyously mangling it, is impossible to say.

* * *

The fact remains that the show at the Cort becomes suddenly and spontaneously funny when this lugubrious clown with the nasal voice is dividing the women of the world into buyers and bums, when he is describing a Jack Oakie college movie he once saw, or when he is inventing a sad and implausible tale of his own romantic infidelities. He makes very simple things,—bouncing up a flight of stairs to give himself the feeling he is going someplace, or offering a toast to absolutely nothing at all —seem richly comic. He even disinters the business of carrying on a telephone conversation with a man who has just enered the room and succeeds in making you like it.

* * *

But most of the evening is dedicated to inspirations like the following:

"I feel like Hamlet."
"A partner of yours?"

Or, to reach for a slightly higher level:

"You've got to romance the customer, the guy who gives us the business."

"That's what he's giving us—the business."

At one point Richard Whorf, as the playboy partner, finds himself suggesting to a model that she "turn around and show the detail." Mr. Whorf is an actor of legitimate stature; and when he is given a scene in which he must break off an extracurricular affair with a broken-hearted secretary, he invests it with a perfectly believable tension. But neither the scene nor the feeling belongs in the play, and "The Fifth Season" might have been better off—if that were under any circumstances possible—with still another vaudevillian in the part.

Phyllis Hill plays the lovelorn employee attractively, Nite Talbot gives us another of her pleasantly imbecile blondes, Lois Wheeler brings an engaging simplicity to the role of a grateful refugee, and John Griggs handles some explosive last-act farce with a reasonable urbanity.

As the program note points out, this is Menasha Skulnik's debut in an English-speaking play. Better, the English should be.

New York Post

January 25, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

Anyway, There's Menasha Skulnik

It must all be the fault of the illustrious firm of Potash and Perlmutter. Ever since the stage of several decades ago had an enormous success with a series of comedies dealing with the adventures of these eminent gentlemen of the clothing business, the theater has been convinced that there was gold for it in the dramatization of the joys and sorrows of the garment industry. The result has been more hopelessly bad plays than probably any other one subject has been responsible for, including maternity, infidelity and the romantic triangle.

As of last Friday night, there was no reason for doubting the blight placed upon the drama by the one-time triumph of the virtually forgotten Abe Potash and Morris Perlmutter. For upon that unhappy evening there opened at the Cort Theater a play by Sylvia Regan called "The Fifth Season" dealing with the presumably comic adventures of a couple of boys named Max Pincus and Johnny Goodwin, and it was just as terrible as its late predecessors have been. Miss Regan's comedy did have the merit of bringing us Menasha Skulnik, but it proceeded to waste him.

Sex and Garments

I suppose the theater's grim and continuous determination to give us a play about the garment trade is understandable, although certainly lamentable. It is not merely that those comedies about Potash and Perlmutter did have their success in the early decades of the century. Perhaps more importantly, the subject gives playwrights and producers an excuse for bringing on the stage a lot of young women in various degrees of undress and exhibiting them as models. Then, too, there seems to be a general relationship betwen the industry and the institution of sex, which

the boys are not averse to using.

At the risk, however, of causing you to suspect that I am losing my sense of proportion, I must admit that I found the aforesaid Mr. Skulnik far more important to "The Fifth Season" than sex as represented by either the dialogue of Miss Regan or the young actresses appearing as the models. Menasha Skulnik, of course, is the eminent comedian from the Yiddish theater, whose glories have long been sung by those of us who had traveled to Second Avenue to see him. On Friday night, he justified us completely, despite the handicap of his shoddy vehicle.

Menasha Skulnik

A forlorn and woebegone comedian, possessing the classic equipment of wistfulness, Mr. Skulnik is an enormously funny fellow and a vastly loveable one. When he has the opportunity to toss the plot to one side and go in for his personal humor, which includes the mixing of cocktails and the description of a football movie featuring Jack Oakie, he is a joy. For too much of the time, though, the narrative is concerned with the firm's business troubles and the partner's mishaps with sex, and, when that phase is on it, the evening is deplorable.

It is the expert Richard Whorf's predicament to have the most to do with carrying on the plot. Mr. Whorf, who looks and acts more like Eddie Cantor than ever, strives valiantly, but he hasn't a chance. That excellent young actress, Lois Wheeler, manages to bring warmth and credibility to the role of a serious-minded girl in the industry, while Augusta Roeland, as a wife, and Phyllis Hill, as a mistress, succeed commendably in bringing a touch of reality to what they are doing. But "The Fifth Season" suggests that the garment industry may be a blight of dangerous proportions on the theater.

Journal American

January 24, 1953

A Slice of Hysteria That Should Linger

By JOHN McCLAIN

MENASHA SKULNICK has been a big star on Second ave. for 20 years, but there were many who could not pronounce his name, let alone understand the Yiddish in which his comedies were performed.

But last night, at the Cort Theatre, he made his Broadway debut which Richard Whorf in an all-English slice of hysteria called "The Fifth Season"—and one wonders why he waited so long to come Uptown.

This is a slight and unpretentious comedy about the garment industry in which there are apparently five seasons: Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter —and Slack.

Sylvia Regan, who wrote it, is not striking at any great depths, but she has succeeded admirably in supplying a vehicle for the talents involved.

Many of her lines would be funny anywhere, with a limited delivery; but many others are given a particular treatment by Skulnick which makes them hilarious.

Perfectly Practical

With hands and arms he can make any adjective assume three different meanings; he can transpose the old familiar drunken scene (you know, he unwittingly makes a lethal cocktail for his girl and himself) into something approaching tenderness; he can be meek, he can be masterful. He is a thoroughly engaging little comedian in any language.

Miss Regan's yarn involves the partnership of Skulnik and Whorf, Seventh Avenue dressmakers, who have overextended themselves in a lavish new office and now have no business.

With the creditors closing in, one of the models who has her eye on Whorf, the attractive "front" for the firm, steers a rich buyer into the premises.

This saves the life of the business but leads to no end of other difficulties, mostly domestic, and eventuates in a romance for Skulnik.

This is a perfectly practical structure and Miss Regan has provided many resoundingly funny situations and lines which have lost none of their lustre through the direction of Gregory Ratoff.

Richard Whorf, an old hand, again is able to keep the ball in the air, moving rapidly through the dull moments, playing straight for his bewildered partner, and at other times lending some credibility to the love story.

I was not absolutely carried away by the performances of the suporting players, but there are a couple of scenes where three models get dressed onstage and I can recommend this highly to all males over a certain age. But you'd better get seats on the LEFT side of the house, a matter of visibility.

This show opened to mild business in Philadelphia but developed such momentum that they wondered if there was any point in coming to New York. Now that they're here I think they'll stay a long time.

DAILY NEWS

January 24, 1953

A Low Comic, Menasha Skulnik, Highly Funny in 'The Fifth Season'

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

Unlike an Arthur Miller hero, I am a guy who is perfectly willing to confess—I confess that Menasha Skulnik is to me one of the funniest men who ever lived. And I also confess that I don't much care whether "The Fifth Season" is a good play or not. My Menasha is in it and that's good enough for me.

I have been watching this silly low comic since his Nifty Napkin characterizations on downtown Second Ave. I have spent years trying to shake hands, make my felt hat wobble, stick my right leg back, and tap same foot in rythm with handshake, the way My Menasha used to do it.

In Sylvia Regan's "The Fifth Season," which arrived last night at the Cort Theatre, Skulnik is co-starred in his first Broadway play with a perfect straight man, Richard Whorf. As a comedy, or as a farce, or even as a vaudeville act, it is full of large, gaping holes. But it is also full of loud laughs and unexpected jokes and My Boy is on stage almost all the time.

Those Undressed Gals.

"The Fifth Season" has other things to recommend it. It has an unassorted half-dozen bee-eautiful models who are really models and (for the sake of dramatic art only) are not only willing but anxious to strip right down to their brassieres and pants. It has the aforementioned Whorf, as a busy young executive type who manages to get some reason out of his role. And it has Phyllis Hill who looks as lush and appealing as a Georgia peach. And it has Lois Wheeler as an attractive refugee.

As to the play itself, it has to do with two partners in what is called the dress industry. They aren't going so good, as we say locally, until a playboy who owns a big string of dress shops comes in and digs the models in their aforementioned brassieres and panties. Then the big buyer reneges a little when payment time comes. Then his amours bounce back at him. In the meantime he gets everybody upset, or everybody gets himself (herself) upset by all sorts of other things.

In the last act, everybody gets reset again. And everybody gets real happy and rich. If other people had different reactions to the dramatic line of "The Fifth Season" all I can say is that I'm sorry. I saw what I seen, or what I like to think I seen.

No Variety Tricks.

Through all this nonsense, M. Skulnik denies himself what must have been the great, fatal temptation—the opportunity to hoke things beyond belief. He does his role straight, only now and then teasing us (or me) with the basic body moves, hand gestures, and facial mugging at which he is an unquestioned boss. He never once goes fully out of character, he never once goes too far. And in transferring himself from the broad low comedy of the musical stage to the restrictions of characterization he gains new warmth, new appeal and despite his unbelievably homely face a new association with a new audience.

As director, Gregory Ratoff keeps the comic scenes moving briskly and well. Ratoff is a little less adept at the serious sequences. His only gimmick, when Whorf and Miss Hill or Whorf and Augusta Roeland, are concerned with emotional passes is to have them play in a whispering, inaudible key.

Daily Mirror

January 24, 1953

'The Fifth Season' Is a Hit Filled with Laughs

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Some of us have been journeying down to the East Side over the years to see a wonderful comedian named Menasha Skulnik in a series of Yiddish attractions. But we can save carfare now, for he has moved uptown to the Cort, where he is playing in English. In Sylvia Regan's "The Fifth Season."

Skulnik is a mild little fellow with droopy shoulders, rolling eyes and expressive hands. Currently he is impersonating a member of the garment firm of Goodwin-Pincus. He's Pincus, who's always having to wangle his more sophisticated, suave and ambitious partner out of financial and domestic difficulties.

* * *

BACHELOR PINCUS is even willing to forsake happiness with a nice young bookkeeper to marry a saftig, wealthy widow to save his friend Goodwin. But the sacrifice is unnecessary. And one of the biggest howls of the evening comes when he rings the changes on friendship via marvelous pantomime.

To Skulnik fall most of the sure-fire laugh lines, and he capitalizes on them magnificently. After drinking a couple of lethal cocktails, which he has concocted from a recipe book, his face distorts and he shudders, exclaiming: "People drink these—for pleasure?"

Now, that may not read funny on paper, but with Skulnik acting it out, it had the first-nighters rolling in the aisles. We could quote you other nifties, too, but it would be superfluous and it might spoil your enjoyment when you visit the Cort.

* * *

"THE FIFTH SEASON" gets its title from a slogan in the garment trade: "Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter and Slacks." The comedy is reminiscent of Montague Glass's immortal "Potash and Perlmutter" series, though it has a special flavor of its own.

It is unabashed hokum. It pretends to be nothing else. But it is irrestistible fun. For it boasts heart and hilarity. It doesn't shy away from sentiment. It has plenty of plot and robust laughs. It's sweet entertainment.

Producer George Kondolf was fortunate, indeed, to land the versatile Richard Whorf to portray Goodwin. Whorf, under Gregory Ratoff's direction, paces the proceedings with unerring skill. And it is a delight to watch him set up the chuckles for Skulnik. He's an actor's actor.

* * *

AUGUSTA ROELAND, as the neglected Mrs. Goodwin; Phyllis Hill, as a model who attracts Goodwin's attentions momentarily; and Lois Wheeler, as the sensitive refugee girl who falls in love with the gentle Pincus, give excellent performances. John Griggs stands out as a philandering buyer, and Dick Kallman is just right as the Goodwins' bewildered, intelligent son.

Salutes also are due Nita Talbot, Norman Rose, Dorian Leigh, Midge Ware and Carolyn Block. And mention must be made of Sam Leve's authentic set and Henry Rosenfeld's smart "dress line." The Rosenfeld creations had the ladies out front oh-ing and ah-ing.

We bow to Kondolf for bringing Skulnik to Broadway and Whorf back to the theatre. For having the courage to produce "The Fifth Season." For realizing that playgoers want lusty laughs. For providing escape from a tax-ridden and fear-torn world.

We enjoyed the new arrival immensely, and we think you will, too. If you've never seen Skulnik before, here's your chance. He's a master with comedy. And Miss Regan's vehicle gives him ample opportunity to display his ingratiating talents.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 24, 1953

A Gay '5th Season'

Play About Dress Firm Partners Provides Farce and Heartbreak

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Fifth Season" may not run as long as "Abie's Irish Rose" did, but it has a good deal of the same charm, and it is a lot better play.

The new comedy rushes through the garment district, shouting a lot of agreeably familiar jokes, and wearing its heart on its sleeve, ready to be broken as easily as you tear a lace paper Valentine in two.

The play is addicted to trite lines and well beaten situations. But it moves with its own gay and touching rhythms, and is acted with a remarkable amount of sincerity and professionalism.

It is a farce at heart, despite occasional breast beating sequences. The wholesale dress firm of Goodwin-Pincus is at a low point, until the partners suddenly sell their whole line to a buyer who is susceptible to the lush models they have borrowed.

While they desperately try to raise cash, and finally get the upper hand of their customer, their personal lives snarl up. The supersalesman Goodwin, almost loses his wife and son when he detours his domestic life into the arms of a blonde. Pincus, the production genius, almost loses his girl, through his habit of taking the blame for other people.

Unquestionably the comedy's surprise offering to Broadway is Menasha Skulnik, so long a star in the Yiddish theater. He looks like a middle aged faun, and has a voice like a frayed cello string. He has a foreshortened figure as if a heavy weight had recently fallen on his head and compressed him.

Sometimes he has the lightness of a musical comedy star, but he never stretches his style to a point where it needs any tunes. He can take the oldest yock in Joe Miller, and give it a new point of view.

He is touching and gallant and funny and lovable, with a genius for playing the audience's mood like a fish on a line, and a greater genius for acting as if he does not know the public is there.

In splendid complement to Skulnik, is Richard Whorf as his go-getting partner. With never a trace of pretentiousness, Whorf plays perfectly straight. His socially ambitious Horatio Alger hero gets his come-uppance and survives. Whorf keeps him sympathetic and entirely believable.

There are four main girls in the picture, and they all seem to have caught the delicate spirit of playing farce, or from the heart, when the moment calls for either mood. Lois Wheeler is sensitive and warm as the secretary Skulnik feels for. Augusta Roeland is chic and agreeable as Whorf's wife. Phyllis Hill gives veracity to the most romantic model, and Nita Talbot lights things up as a most maternal one.

Some of the sexiest models in the dress business have moved up Seventh Ave. to the Cort for "The Fifth Season." They not only parade about, flaunting their Marilyn Monroes, but make their changes in full view of the audience, a most instructive and unusual view of this aspect of the dress business.

John Griggs is the sharp customer who ends up buying everything in sight for his own best interests, and Norman Rose is a daffy designer of the innumerable costumes that get paraded around the stage. Dick Kallman agreeably plays the young son of Whorf who finds himself delivering to the boy advice which better suits himself.

The greatest virtue of "The Fifth Season"—in the dress business, the slack season—is its unimportance, and its frank aim to do nothing but divert you, and set you howling with laughter every once in a while. True to its theme its gags come constantly from clothes, as Whorf constantly changes his suits, or Skulnik bemoans his inability for 23 years to make a coat and pants wear out at the same time.

"The Crucible"

Journal American

January 23, 1953

Play of Enormous Strength and Depth

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE Salem, Mass., witch hunt—a grisly little chapter in Colonial Americana—has been pressed into service by Arthur Miller as background for "The Crucible," his new drama which was presented at the Martin Beck Theatre last night.

This is a play of enormous strength, written with depth and intelligence: the characters declaim and behave as I assume they did in 1692; it is performed by a large and uniformly expert cast; the direction of Jed Harris is forceful and sympathetic.

Yet when I came away, with whistles and shouts of "bravo!" still ringing in the house, I had a lonely sense of unfulfillment. I was not greatly moved by anything that had happened.

Something Lacking

There is no doubt of the validity of Miller's historical facts, give and take a little license now and then, or the power of his writing, but it seemed to me that something was lacking in his choice of subject.

Fact or not, I found it constantly incredible that four malicious maidens in Salem, 1692, could have corrupted the courts and brought about the horror, and execution of so many obviously innocent folk.

Okay, it happened. But it is so far beyond our present concepts of justice and plausible behavior that I never felt myself part of the proceedings. I never really believed the little monsters that set off the fuse, or that they could make their case stick with the Deputy-Governor of Massachusetts.

Looking at it from this distance, it had the elements of a nightmare which resulted from a bad period movie and a welsh rarebit.

Maybe in the year 2214 somebody will try to write a believable play about the New York waterfront in 1953—but I doubt it.

All this does not detract, however, from the brilliant efforts of Walter Hampden, as the stern and unrelenting magistrate who sends the blameless to the gallows; or Arthur Kennedy, the young father, who emerges once more as one of our most gifted and facile young actors.

Arduous Role

Beatrice Straight, as his wife, limited by many scenes in which she is merely required to say, "Aye," at intervals, comes to life later and brings the final moments close to credibility.

E. G. Marshall, playing the part of a parson—the one rational person connected with the law—brings warmth and sympathy to an arduous role.

In lesser spots Fred Stewart, Jenny Egan, Jean Adair and Madeleine Sherwood were notable. Boris Aronson succeeded in creating some dour New England settings, keeping the stage open for the large cast, and the costumes of Edith Lutyens are sympathetically simple and tasteful.

In "Death of a Salesman" Mr. Miller was writing about people he knew, and thus established himself as one of our most gifted young playwrights. "The Crucible" reveals the same high talent for dialogue, for a well-rounded scene; I only wish he'd written it around people more presently understandable.

"THE CRUCIBLE"

Drama by Arthur Miller; staged by Jed Harris; settings by Boris Aronson; costumes by Edith Lutyens; presented by Kermit Bloomgarden at the Martin Beck Theatre, January 22, 1953. The cast:

Betty Parris...Janet Alexander
Tituba.....Jacqueline Andre
Rev. Samuel Parris.....
Fred Stewart
Abigail Williams.....
Madeleine Sherwood
Susanna Wallcott.....
Barbara Stanton
Mrs. Ann Putnam..Jane Hoffman
Thomas Putnam.....
Raymond Bramley
Mercy Lewis...Dorothy Jolliffe
Mary Warren.....Jenny Egan
John Proctor...Arthur Kennedy
Rebecca Nurse.....Jean Adair
Giles Corey....Joseph Sweeney
Rev. John Hale..E. G. Marshall
Elizabeth Proctor.....
Beatrice Straight
Francis Nurse..Graham Velsey
Ezekiel Cheever..Don McHenry
John Willard...George Mitchell
Judge Hathorne..Philip Coolidge
Deputy-Gov. Danforth.....
Walter Hampden
Sarah Good.....Adele Fortin
Hopkins.....Donald Marye

DAILY NEWS

January 23, 1953

Miller's 'The Crucible' Terrifying Tragedy About Puritan Bigotry

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Arthur Miller's expectantly-awaited drama about witch-hunting in Salem, Mass., in the year 1692, was presented at the Martin Beck Theatre last evening by Kermit Bloomgarden. It is a stunning production, splendidly acted and strongly written.

However, those who may have expected Miller, an admitted liberal, to make a political parable of this play—as he did with Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People"—will have to read into "The Crucible" their own implications, for the piece is just what it sets out to be: a tragic drama about the historic Puritan purge of witchcraft. It is, as it ends, the story of an upright man who finds within himself the courage to be hanged rather than to confess a guilt he does not own.

A Relentless Account.

It is quite a story, as it relentlessly tells how small lies—children's lies—build and build until a whole town is aroused and 19 men and women go to the gallows for being possessed of the Devil. A twentieth dies by "pressing"—by having rocks piled on his chest until he is crushed. They are good men and women—upright, hard-working, compassionate and God-fearing.

A young girl is ill with a strange malady. Her father, a minister of the church, has seen her, a cousin and some other girls dancing in the woods by moonlight to the chant of a Barbados Negro woman. He thinks she may have been bewitched. A minister from another town is brought in to help exorcise the devil. The girls who frolicked with the child confess that they were possessed by the Evil One, and denunciations and accusations spread until the whole town becomes involved and a deputy governor of the Commonwealth is brought in to try the heathen.

An Exciting Scene.

Miller's story focuses upon a young farmer, his wife and a young servant-girl who maliciously causes the wife's arrest for witchcraft. The farmer brings the girl to court to admit she lied—and here, in this trial scene, is the big moment of "The Crucible." It is a chilling, blood-curdling, terrifying scene as it depicts the monstrous course of bigotry and deceit. The farmer, instead of saving his wife, finds himself, also, accused, imprisoned and condemned.

Jed Harris has directed the play with great force and precision, and there are some fine performances. Arthur Kennedy again shows himself as one of the best of our younger actors in the role of the farmer. Walter Hampden is impressive as the deputy governor come to give judgment—bland, icy and relentless. Beatrice Straight is a lovely, tragic figure as the wife.

In the large cast there is much good work—particularly by Fred Stewart as a bigoted minister and by E. G. Marshall as another minister whose bigotry turns to remorse. There also are vivid moments for a number of accusers and accused, such as Abigail Williams, Dorothy Joliffe, Philip Coolidge, Jean Adair and Joseph Sweeney. The first audience called on the author to take a bow.

New York Post

January 23, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

Mr. Miller Looks at Witch-Hunting

Arthur Miller's "The Crucible," which opened at the Martin Beck last night, is a drama of emotional power and impact. In it, the author of "Death of a Salesman" is contemplating the rise of mass hysteria and intolerance as represented by the horrible Salem witch trials of 1692, and, although he clearly would not be averse to having his spectators notice certain disquieting resemblances to present-day conditions, he doesn't press the parallels too closely. The result is a hard-hitting and effective play that demands and deserves audience attention, even though it lacks some of the compelling excellence I had expected of it.

This is certainly not to say that "The Crucible" is without the spirit and eloquence that we have come to expect of Mr. Miller. Almost throughout, the play's emotional forthrightness grips the attention and holds it amid a succession of scenes of unrelenting excitement. It is written with feeling and indignation, and the importance of what it is saying by implication gives it dignity, largeness and inescapable distinction. In scene after scene, it has the sort of ringing intensity that is fairly irresistible.

Emotion and Intellect

Emotionally, I think it is vastly successful. Where I found it a little disappointing in its final effectiveness is in Mr. Miller's inability to combine with it the kind of intellectual insight that was so notable in "Death of a Salesman" and made it one of the most distinguished dramas of the American theater. To a certain extent, the author does delve into the causes and motives that created the background of the terrors which marked one of the darkest spots in our history. But he is chiefly concerned with what happened, rather than why, and this neglect sometimes gives his work a hint of superficiality.

It is no doubt highly unfair to compare Miller's treatment of intolerance with Bernard Shaw's magnificent use of the theme in "Saint Joan," but I hope I can show what I mean by contrasting the Inquisitor in the latter drama with Deputy-Governor Danforth in "The Crucible." Shaw made his Inquisitor a man of great intellectual gifts and moral stature, and was all the more impressive by showing that intolerance could force even such a person into the terrible act of burning Joan at the stake. Miller's Deputy-Governor is also a well-meaning man doing frightful things, but, despite Walter Hampden's excellent playing, he emerges as pretty much a cardboard villain.

Fire and Indignation

While there is, to my mind, an unfortunate superficiality in "The Crucible," the playwright deserves considerable credit for using implication, rather than too heavy an underlining, to make his valuable points for today. There are, indeed, only a few moments when he doesn't let his sinister story speak for itself, and they are chiefly in the last act. But his characters tend to be dramatized points of view, or points of emotional hysteria, rather than the human beings that would have made them more striking in the theater. Nevertheless, despite such weaknesses, there is much emotional fire and indignation which can approach the overwhelming.

It seems a little fantastic to say that the veteran Mr. Hampden, at his age, is improving as an actor, but I don't think I have seen him finer than he is in "The Crucible." Arthur Kennedy proves once more his right to be considered one of the ablest of our younger actors by the moving honesty with which he plays an outraged and unheroic man trying to fight hysteria, and there are excellent portrayals by Beatrice Straight, E. G. Marshall, Fred Stewart, Madeleine Sherwood, Joseph Sweeney, Raymond Bramley, Jenny Egan and Jean Adair. Jed Harris has directed vigorously. Despite its frailties, "The Crucible" is not easily to be forgotten.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 23, 1953

Witchcraft Boiled in 'The Crucible'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Crucible," Arthur Miller's agitating new melodrama, refers to the purification of men's conscience through terrible trial.

Mr. Miller goes back to the 17th century witchcraft trials in Salem, and tells a convulsive dramatic story. How close to real sources the play remains, is unimportant. It is big and bold and very theatrical. Sometimes it is very neat. The chief instigator of the fatal business is motivated by lust for her former employer, hoping to destroy his wife and replace her.

Sometimes the scales are overbalanced as when the court is painted so bloodthirsty that the malicious accusers pale by comparison to it.

Unusual Complexities.

But then the drama spirals in, from the story of a community whose repressions invite mass insanity, to the finer struggle of one man with his conscience. Condemned along with many others, the young farmer whose lust for an evil child has begun the trouble, must decide to confess consorting with the Devil, or die.

"The Crucible" gets mature power from unusual complexities. The rigidly honest wife could lie to save her husband's name, yet cannot urge him to lie when the stake is his life.

Two Memorable Lines.

The expression "witch hunt" has become familiar in recent years. In writing of Salem, Mr. Miller attempts no blatant modern comparisons, beyond stating timeless truths about guilt and conscience and hysteria and bandwagon instincts. There are two highly memorable lines, both questions. "Is the accuser always holy now?" the young husband cries. And "Witchcraft is ipso facto invisible, so who can testify against it?" asks the deputy-governor.

Given the tumultuous Miller script, certainly the next hero of the evening is Jed Harris. He not only gives the play real ebbs and floods, but has directed some splendid performances. Co-starred are Arthur Kennedy, at his rare best as the farmer who must live or die for honor, and Walter Hampden, sinister with fanatic cant as the judge.

Beatrice Straight as the honest wife gives the best performance of her career, acting with new weight and strength added to her familiar touching feminity. E. G. Marshall is lucid and utterly clear in the role of the visiting clergyman whose eyes are opened.

Fred Stewart is faithful and consistent with the gratuitously evil character of the local preacher, and Madeleine Sherwood shows herself a dramatic actress of real stature as the ring-leader of the fake victims of witchcraft. Jacqueline Andre is striking as the Barbadian.

A Broadway debutante, Jenny Egan, plays with the purest taste the delicate emotional role of the girl who is frightened out of confessing the whole vicious truth. And a Broadway veteran, Joseph Sweeney, gives probably the best performance of his career as the thoughtless accuser of his own wife.

Mr. Miller has made important advances in the poetic quality of his writing in "The Crucible." Its premiere last night was greeted with 19 curtain calls by a vociferous audience.

Daily Mirror

January 23, 1953

'The Crucible' A Stirring, Well-Acted Melodrama

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "The Crucible," Arthur Miller has penned a rip-roaring melodrama about the historic witch trials in Salem, Mass. He has designed a script for actors to act on a stage, rather than for pedants to read in a library. And that's what all good playwrights should aim to do.

Miller has etched "The Crucible" with broad strokes. Sometimes the dialogue resorts to a sort of blank verse, and at others to colloquial speech. But the two blend admirably. And he has developed robust situations on which to drape the wordage.

• • •

WHEN SEVERAL "children" —they appear to be at least 17 or 18 years old—pretend to have seen evidences of witchcraft to cover their dancing at night in the woods, a reign of terror ensues in Salem Township. And one of the girls abets the hysteria to obtain revenge on her former employers.

With hundreds of innocent people jailed, and a few hanged, revolt brews against superstition and injustice in the Bay Colony. But not before one stalwart subject joins some of his fellows on the gallows rather than be tempted into confessing a sin he never committed.

Director Jed Harris has wisely staged "The Crucible" in vigorous style. He makes his players act in the grand manner, with resounding tones and large gestures. He, like us, must believe that our theatre has grown too anemic. That it needs big doses of sheer vitality.

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WALTER HAMPDEN, of the eloquent voice, is an impressive, determined, inflexible Deputy Governor; Arthur Kennedy, a brawny, infuriated victim; Beatrice Straight, a wife of fiery but restrained conviction; and E. G. Marshall, a well-meaning, frightened preacher who discovers too late the fraud behind the horrors.

Jenny Egan, making her Broadway bow, gives a beautifully evocative emotional performance as an intimidated, scared witness. Madeleine Sherwood, another newcomer, is excellent as the malicious instigator of the tragic trials. Salutes also are due Jean Adair, Joseph Sweeney, Fred Stewart, Don McHenry, Philip Coolidge Jacqueline Andre.

Boris Aronson has designed sets that convey the stern environment of Massachusetts in 1692 for producer Kermit Bloomgarden. And the Edith Lutyens' costumes appear to be authentic.

IT ALL ADDS UP to an arresting evening of theatre. A harrowing, suspenseful, intensely dramatic evening. In fact, it holds the spectator so well forward in his seat as to wear him down toward the end. It had the first - nighters cheering at the Martin Beck.

We doubt that "THE CRUCIBLE" is for the tired business men of legend. They would do better to try a revue. But it should spellbind those who relish real drama, conflict and impassioned action. Qualities on which effective theatre should rely.

Some may try to read into it more than we suspect is there. If there are deep implications in the script for modern playgoers, we failed to find them. Just take it as a stirring melodrama acted to the hilt.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

January 23, 1953

'The Crucible'

By WALTER F. KERR

ARTHUR MILLER is a problem playwright, in both senses of the word. As a man of independent thought, he is profoundly, angrily concerned with the immediate issues of our society—with the irresponsible pressures which are being brought to bear on free men, with the self-seeking which blinds whole segments of our civilization to justice, with the evasions and dishonesties into which cowardly men are daily slipping. And to his fiery editorializing he brings shrewd theatrical gifts: he knows how to make a point plain, how to give it bite in the illustration, how to make its caustic and cauterizing language ring out on the stage.

He is also an artist groping toward something more poetic than simple, savage journalism. He has not only the professional crusader's zeal for humanity, but the imaginative writer's feeling for it —how it really behaves, how it moves about a room, how it looks in its foolish as well as in its noble attitudes—and in his best play, "Death of a Salesman," he was able to rise above the sermon and touch the spirit of some simple people.

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In "The Crucible," which opened at the Martin Beck Thursday, he seems to me to be taking a step backward into mechanical parable, into the sort of play which lives not in the warmth of humbly observed human souls but in the ideological heat of polemic.

Make no mistake about it: there is fire in what Mr. Miller has to say, and there is a good bit of sting in his manner of saying it. He has, for convenience's sake, set his troubling narrative in the Salem of 1692. For reasons of their own, a quartet of exhibitionistic young women are hurling accusations of witchcraft at eminently respectable members of a well-meaning, but not entirely clear-headed, society.

On the basis of hearsay—"guilt by association with the devil" might be the phrase for it—a whole community of innocents are brought to trial and condemned to be hanged. As Mr. Miller pursues his very clear contemporary parallel, there are all sorts of relevant thrusts: the folk who do the final damage are not the lunatic fringe but the gullible pillars of society; the courts bog down into travesty in order to comply with the popular mood; slander becomes the weapon of opportunists ("Is the accuser always holy now?"); freedom is possible at the price of naming one's associates in crime; even the upright man is eventually tormented into going along with the mob to secure his own way of life, his own family.

Much of this—not all—is an accurate reading of our own turbulent age, and there are many times at the Martin Beck when one's intellectual sympathies go out to Mr. Miller and to his apt symbols anguishing on the stage. But it is the intellect which goes out, not the heart.

• • •

For Salem, and the people who live, love, fear and die in it, are really only conveniences to Mr. Miller, props to his thesis. He does not make them interesting in and for themselves, and you wind up analyzing them, checking their dilemmas against the latest headlines, rather than losing yourself in any rounded, deeply rewarding personalities. You stand back and think; you don't really share very much.

Under Jed Harris' firm and driving hand, a large and meticulously cast company performs expertly. Arthur Kennedy brings integrity and candor to a role that is not really not much more than a banner for Mr. Miller's thought. But when he is shaking his head over the greediness of a minister and muttering "It hurt my prayer it hurt my prayer," or when he is laboriously naming the Ten Commandments and forgetting the one he has most recently broken, he invests a two-dimensional figure with great perception.

• • •

Beatrice Straight is a fine complement to him as the wife who has centered too much of her life on her husband's single infidelity, and Walter Hampden gives a beautifully varied, fiercely powerful performance as a wily judge who is jealous of his authority and bent on turning an official investigation to his own preconceived ends.

In lesser roles, Jean Adair is especially striking as an old woman of unquenchable honor, E. G. Marshall supplies a needed subtlety in the role of a man of God who must begin to doubt his own devils, Joseph Sweeney is rousing as a crusty villager with genuine common sense and Madeleine Sherwood finds a believable intensity for her venomous trouble maker.

Boris Aronson has designed four spare, clean settings which succeed in evoking that Salem which Mr. Miller has not been patient enough to create.

The New York Times
January 23, 1953

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Arthur Miller has written another powerful play. "The Crucible," it is called, and it opened at the Martin Beck last evening in an equally powerful performance. Riffling back the pages of American history, he has written the drama of the witch trials and hangings in Salem in 1692. Neither Mr. Miller nor his audiences are unaware of certain similarities between the perversions of justice then and today.

But Mr. Miller is not pleading a cause in dramatic form. For "The Crucible," despite its current implications, is a self-contained play about a terrible period in American history. Silly accusations of witchcraft by some mischievous girls in Puritan dress gradually take possession of Salem. Before the play is over good people of pious nature and responsible temper are condemning other good people to the gallows.

* * *

Having a sure instinct for dramatic form, Mr. Miller goes bluntly to essential situations. John Proctor and his wife, farm people, are the central characters of the play. At first the idea that Goodie Procter is a witch is only an absurd rumor. But "The Crucible" carries the Proctors through the whole ordeal—first vague suspicion, then the arrest, the implacable, highly wrought trial in the church vestry, the final opportunity for John Proctor to save his neck by confessing to something he knows is a lie, and finally the baleful roll of the drums at the foot of the gallows.

Although "The Crucible" is a powerful drama, it stands second to "Death of a Salesman" as a work of art. Mr. Miller has had more trouble with this one, perhaps because he is too conscious of its implications. The literary style is cruder. The early motivation is muffled in the uproar of the opening scene, and the theme does not develop with the simple eloquence of "Death of a Salesman."

It may be that Mr. Miller has tried to pack too much inside his drama, and that he has permitted himself to be concerned more with the technique of the witch hunt than with its humanity. For all its power generated on the surface, "The Crucible" is most moving in the simple, quiet scenes between John Proctor and his wife. By the standards of "Death of a Salesman," there is too much excitement and not enough emotion in "The Crucible."

* * *

As the director, Jed Harris has given it a driving performance in which the clashes are fierce and clamorous. Inside Boris Aronson's gaunt, pitiless sets of rude buildings, the acting is at a high pitch of bitterness, anger and fear. As the patriarchal deputy Governor, Walter Hampden gives one of his most vivid performances in which righteousness and ferocity are unctuously mated. Fred Stewart as a vindictive parson, E. G. Marshall as a parson who finally rebels at the indiscriminate ruthlessness of the trial, Jean Adair as an aging woman of God, Madeleine Sherwood as a malicious town hussy, Joseph Sweeney as an old man who has the courage to fight the court, Philip Coolidge as a sanctimonious judge—all give able performances.

As John Proctor and his wife, Arthur Kennedy and Beatrice Straight have the most attractive roles in the drama and two or three opportunities to act them together in moments of tranquillity. They are superb—Mr. Kennedy clear and resolute, full of fire, searching his own mind; Miss Straight, reserved, detached, above and beyond the contention. Like all the members of the cast, they are dressed in the chaste and lovely costumes Edith Lutyens has designed from old prints of early Massachusetts.

After the experience of "Death of a Salesman" we probably expect Mr. Miller to write a masterpiece every time. "The Crucible" is not of that stature and it lacks that universality. On a lower level of dramatic history with considerable pertinence for today, it is a powerful play and a genuine contribution to the season.

"Mid-Summer"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
January 22, 1953

'Mid-Summer'

By WALTER F. KERR

WEDNESDAY night a playhouse which had been sold down the river to radio some fourteen years ago returned to the legitimate fold. And the relighting of the Vanderbilt, an intimate house on 48th St., is cause enough for rejoicing.

But there is other good news. A young actress of extraordinary sensitivity has been handed her first full-dress Broadway part and she has made it the most moving experience of the season.

* * *

Geraldine Page, discovered in a Village production of "Summer and Smoke" last year, is—in every sense—the heroine of "Midsummer." Cast as the timid, unlettered wife of an ambitious schoolteacher, a woman who honestly doesn't think herself bright enough to deserve her own daughter's obedience, Miss Page has found an infinity of revealing gesture, of startling insight, of touching detail with which to illuminate an appealing role.

As she surreptitiously dusts an old-fashioned brass bedstead, fingers a faded shirtwaist in prim embarrassment, glows with inordinate pride over the number of books her husband has read, and stashes away the remnants of a fancy dinner in her battered purse, a complex and heart-breaking human being comes into existence.

* * *

Miss Page has, furthermore, created this shining figure with a minimum of help from her author. Vina Delmar has turned out a decidedly minor bit of playmaking in "Midsummer."

A twig off the "Tree Grows in Brooklyn" school of literary memoirs, the new piece at the Vanderbilt covers some awfully familiar ground. (The schoolteacher is fed up with village life, has hustled his impoverished family into a run-down New York hotel, and is trying to make the grade as a professional songwriter.) Its invention is limited, its mood somewhat monotonous, its writing undistinguished. Mark Stevens, an obviously capable actor, never does find the special, highly personal inspiration which will make his vaudeville-bound husband much more interesting than the hero of a grade-B movie.

* * *

But Miss Page has resources of her own, and she brings to an extended last act scene—in which she must successively apologize for her own inferiority, insist upon the kind of life she thinks best for her family, and then realize that husband and child have outgrown her—a disturbing honesty, an electric reality.

Nearly as interesting as Miss Page's work is the phenomenal — almost frightening — accuracy of nine-year-old Jenny Hecht. Daughter of Ben Hecht and already something of a motion picture veteran, this uncanny child sits cross-legged on a table, stares at her elders with a tolerant smile, and disturbs their complacency with a poised, airy, and knowing self-possession that is shattering.

* * *

The tenuous play profits further from the rasping voice and boundless good-nature of Vicki Cummings, awash in plumes as a lady of very little virtue; and from the incisive performance Edgar Stehli is giving as a gentleman of the cloth who must put up with the nine year old's voluble quotation of Robert Ingersoll.

"Midsummer" is not a play of any special distinction; but it does offer at least two performances of rare and rewarding quality.

"MID-SUMMER"

Play by Vina Delmar; staged by Paul Crabtree; settings by Howard Bay; costumes by Motley; presented by Mr. Crabtree and Frank J. Hale at the Vanderbilt Theatre, January 21, 1953. The cast:

Lily	Geraldine Page
Mrs. Lenoir	Suzanne Caubaye
Carlo	Jenny Hecht
Rosie	Mary James
Val	Mark Stevens
Mr. Lenoir	Paul Andor
Julia	Vicki Cummings
Mr. Strobel	Howard Smith
Bill Moore	Robert Emmett
Edouard	Billy Jeffries
Francois	Barry Blake
Dr. Emsley	Edgar Stehli

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 22, 1953

'Mid-Summer' Brings A Talented Actress

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Mid-Summer" introduces Geraldine Page to Broadway by way of the Vanderbilt Theater.

That is its greatest service to the theater and the public. Miss Page is the actress who attracted so much favorable attention in "Summer and Smoke" in the Village last season.

Here she proves that her sensitive instincts and intuitive talents are transportable. She also proves that, in selecting this play for her Broadway debut, she has no more judgment about a script than most other actors.

It is thinly written, sentimental and inconsequential. "Mid-Summer" tells of a young school teacher's illiterate wife, who values his intellect more than he does. His restless urge is for the world of vaudeville.

The wife wants the domestic life which will let her ply her only talent, for home making, so she can be important to him and their precocious child.

The switch at the end makes her a little too good to be true, for me, but that is perhaps a matter of taste. Since the characters are single-minded and transparent to a man, the degree of the wife's goodness can not distinguish her much from the company she keeps.

The play is set in 1907 on 14th St. The doors and window are wide open. In all except one scene there is less noise outside than there would be on a block in Pompeii. It is disconcerting, too, that stage lights reflect like pink balloons in the window panes.

These technical maladies only underline the play's lack of richness and authenticity. The language has no flavor of period, and the action rarely corroborates the talk of hot weather. Vicki Cummings plays one of her familiar gold-hearted bad girls.

Mark Stevens also makes a local debut, and reveals a crisp style for underplaying, good looks and a curtness that is ill at ease in such sentimental surroundings. Little Jenny Hecht reels off the book learning of the prodigy with just the honorable rattle such a youngster might employ for tedious grown ups. Among a series of sincere performers, Edgar Stehli plays most wisely with the best role of the minister who is impressed with the ignorant wife.

The really memorable scene of the evening is of Miss Page's ecstasy at finally getting her dearest wish in life. Her inarticulate joy not only tells more of the character, but of the whole play's intention, than most of the entire rest of the evening.

DAILY NEWS

January 22, 1953

'Mid-Summer' Endearing Comedy; Geraldine Page a Superb Actress

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The long-lost Vanderbilt Theatre in 48th St. was restored to the legitimate theatre last evening, and its owner, Irving Maidman, should be a very happy man today. The Vanderbilt's first tenant, "Mid-Summer," by Vina Delmar, is a grand and endearing sentimental comedy, and in it is a simply beautiful performance by Geraldine Page.

In this town, Miss Page has been known only to those who caught her performance in "Summer and Smoke" in Greenwich Village; but she is no footlight Cinderella. Her background is years of hard work in stock in the environs of Chicago and many of the Eastern straw-hats — and so, last evening, this very attractive young lady was thoroughly equipped for her big chance on Broadway. Just how well-equipped she is you should see for yourself; as for me, it has been a long time since I have seen a girl give so sensitive, artful and lovely a performance. Nor is it an easy one; the third act, with its changes of mood and pace, would trip a less skillful actress—and a less skillful actress might trip up the whole play.

Mrs. Delmar, who wrote a good piece called "Bad Girl" about 20 years ago, wrote "Mid-Summer" four or five years ago, with her husband Eugene collaborating, and it has kicked around this manager's office and that ever since. Paul Crabtree and Frank J. Hale are the lucky ones who have it now—and, to protect his managerial share, Crabtree has directed a very good company of actors in true and heartwarming performances.

In the Days of 1907.

"Mid-Summer" is unabashedly sentimental but also brightly funny as it tells the story of three days in a dismal 14th St. hotel room in the year of 1907. Here are living, flat broke, an ex-teacher, his ex-waitress wife and their precocious daughter. The teacher is a good one, as witness the mental capacities of his child, but he has rebelled against the safe, small and dull world of academe. He wants to write songs and vaudeville skits—to move into a bigger, more exciting, more promising world.

But this frightens the wife. She is not, she admits, very bright. She has been working since she was 8 and can't even read—but she can make a home. Her idea of heaven on earth is something small and safe—a good teaching job with a nice little white house and a steady little income. There is much to be said for her, and Miss Page says it eloquently. The story of "Mid-Summer" is the story of which way this young couple moves—toward a school on Staten Island or a one-week vaudeville tryout at a beach resort.

Two Other Fine Debuts.

Mrs. Delmar has peopled her comedy with many interesting and pleasant characters, and they have been cast and directed unerringly. Mark Stevens, of Hollywood, is making his Broadway debut as the young husband, and he is giving a most ingratiating performance. Ben Hecht's 9-year-old child, Jenny, is making her Broadway debut as the brainy moppet and is a complete delight as she rattles off the names of all the Presidents from Washington to Roosevelt (Teddy), quotes Longfellow, Emerson and Ingersoll and yet remains a nice little girl. Once she comes in with a red balloon somebody has given her and an adult visitor patronizingly admires it. "You may have it," says Miss Hecht pleasantly; "it makes me feel silly."

Excellent Setting.

Most of the comedy punch-lines are entrusted to Vicki Cummings, in the role of an old man's doxy with a heart of gold, and they couldn't be in better custody. Miss Cummings makes a dashing picture as an overdressed floozy of the period (overdressing artfully done by Motley). There are other good, interesting and amusing performances by Suzanne Caubaye as a French landlady, Robert Emmett as a vaudeville gag man (his soft-shoe routine with Stevens is excellent), Howard Smith as the pompous proprietor of Miss Cummings, Mary James as a maid, and by Edgar Stehli as a ministerial trustee of a discreet Staten Island school.

Howard Bay's setting of the awful hotel room is the most inspired piece of drabness since Robert Edmond Jones did the saloon for "The Iceman Cometh." "Mid-Summer" may not be art, but it makes theatregoing a pleasure.

The New York Times

January 22, 1953

Vina Delmar Dramatizes Some Problems of Two Married Folks in 'Mid-Summer'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Vina Delmar's "Mid-Summer," which opened at the Vanderbilt last evening, is an interesting play that seems always on the verge of distinction. Set in a squalid hotel room in New York in 1907, it is the story of two penniless young married people who are of two minds about the future. Having been an obscure schoolteacher, he is fascinated with show business, which seems to him alive. All she wants is a small house where she can cook and bring up her daughter normally. He wants excitement and money. Money does not tempt her.

That is a bald summary of the issues in conflict in Miss Delmar's flavorsome play. But it hardly does justice to the things that make it interesting—the impromptu life of a battered hotel operated by an ingratiating French couple; the generous friendship of the kept woman who lives upstairs; the puzzled good-will of a clergyman from Staten Island; the startling precociousness of the little girl who has memorized famous poetry and prose, and has a mind of her own.

* * *

Some of "Mid-Summer" is very funny. Some of it is touching because it comes so close to the things that hurt people. And the scene in which the clergyman tries anxiously to decide whether such an odd couple would be suitable for the town in which he lives—this scene is thoroughly poignant. Miss Delmar has written it so bluntly.

In the circumstances, this theatregoer is reluctant to report that "Mid-Summer" as a whole seems to him to be scattered and inconclusive, a mixture of genuine observation and theatre stereotypes. Although the prattle about show business has a certain exuberance, it is in a different key from the other material.

To Miss Delmar the simple-minded wife, inarticulate though sensitive, is something of a heroine; she represents purity of heart. But in the context of the play she seems unfortunately to be a little feeble-minded. Although her husband seems to love her, he is not going to get much comfort or support from her in the long years that begin when the curtain goes down.

* * *

And is it fair to add that Paul Crabtree's direction is also confused? Howard Bay has designed a shabby hotel bedroom that has a lot of harsh force. Motley has provided period costumes, some of which are pathetic, some of which are comic or nostalgic and all of which illuminate the moods of the play.

After playing in "Summer and Smoke" in the Village, Geraldine Page has come north to act the ignorant but kind-hearted wife in "Mid-Summer." When the drama gives her something to work with, as in the scene with the clergyman, Miss Page can break your heart, for she plays without artifice. But like the play, she does not seem quite certain whether the wife is a noble primitive or a moron; and the last scene is too excitable and generalized to leave a clear impression on the audience. It is hard to tell on short notice how much of the fault is hers or Miss Delmar's.

Mark Stevens plays the better resolved part of the husband with considerable good nature, skill and sincerity. As the clergyman, Edgar Stehli makes a notable impression on the play by the quiet anxiety of his manner. You can count on Vicki Cummings to make something both affectionate and amusing out of the gaudy lady of the town. Little Jenny Hecht, fat as a hen's forehead, is frequently hilarious as the precocious daughter. Suzanne Caubaye and Paul Andor give agreeable performances as the proprietors of the slatternly hotel.

In comparison with the stuff we have been latterly receiving on Broadway, "Mid-Summer" is a notable improvement. It has original characters and theme. At least to one theatregoer, however, it does not fulfill the promise of the best things that are in it, and the conclusion seems more like a collapse than a decision.

Journal American

January 22, 1953

Geraldine Page—New Star Is Born

By JOHN McCLAIN

A NEW STAR, if ever one was born, appeared on the stage of the Vanderbilt Theatre last night and through sheer magic nearly succeeded in lifting a pedestrian play to true distinction. Her name is Geraldine Page, this was her first performance on Broadway, and it is rarely that one is privileged to witness a performance bearing such unmistakable evidence of greatness.

The play itself, a new one by Vina Delmar entitled "Mid-Summer," is unfortunately ungreat. The story it tells lacks cohesion and strength or, at times, logic. Some of the characters are drawn with accuracy and understanding; others are the most palpable tintypes.

A scene of true emotional value will be followed by one in which most of the jokes, and some of the situations, seem to have been borrowed from Joe Miller's joke book. "I was living on a river in China with a native sampan," an actor says. Which provokes the query: "Does she ever write to you?" That kind of thing.

Beyond the Call

But through all this, over it and beyond the call of duty, Miss Page proceeds to build her part with such gentle and absorbing skill that one is almost able to forget the cliches, the dry moments, in pure absorption with her problem.

This problem Miss Delmar has presented her with is an old favorite and perfectly valid in itself. Mark Stevens has been a bit of a scholar—a small-time school teacher. But this is a plodding existence and he has decided to strike out as a free-lance writer of vaudeville acts in New York (this being 1907).

After the savings are gone and his wife and little girl are hungry he gets a chance to join a vaudeville team. Coincidentally, he is offered a job and a contract to teach school in Staten Island.

A nebulous shot at big money or security in a white house in the suburbs—that is the problem. And by the time Miss Page gets through with it there isn't a dry eye on either side of the footlights.

Contributing toward this crisis are the services of many excellent actors. Mark Stevens, also making his debut, is charming and assured as the husband and it is regrettable that he is made to be occasionally ridiculous, not quite believable, and that his wife's big scenes leave him with little to do.

Vicki Cummings is that same character, the faded keptie with the heart of gold, but the lines have been funnier and the situation more rewarding elsewhere.

Little Miss Jenny Hecht, the daughter of Ben and another first-timer, is absolutely captivating in the role of the prodigy daughter. She is nine and she is required to spend large sections of the evening naming all the Presidents of the United States, reciting poems and essays. She must BE a prodigy.

There also are fine efforts from Edgar Stehli, Susan Caubaye, Paul Andor, Mary James, Robert Emmett and Howard Smith.

Howard Bay has constructed a charmingly run-down impression of a cheap New York hotel, and Paul Crabtree's direction, sometimes faltering, comes to life during the important scenes.

"Mid-Summer" isn't worth much as a play—but Miss Page is. She's worth a visit to the Vanderbilt.

Daily Mirror

January 22, 1953

'Mid-Summer' Has a Star In Geraldine Page

By ROBERT COLEMAN

A new star was born at the Vanderbilt Theatre last evening, when Paul Crabtree and Frank Hale introduced Geraldine Page to Broadway in Vina Delmar's "Mid-Summer." This is the young actress who has been scoring a success in the Loft Players' revival of "Summer and Smoke" in Greenwich Village.

Miss Page reminds us a little of Pauline Lord. She has the same high-pitched, wispy voice, hands that flutter effectively in moments of frustration, a choppy, puzzled manner in delivering lines. She halts, hesitates, fumbles and yet always manages to hit the right note, to convey unerringly the author's meanings.

MISS PAGE is currently impersonating Lily Barton who, because she never had education, wants her husband, a brilliant young teacher, to give up his dreams of a career in show business and return to the classroom. He, sick of poverty, padagogic drudgery and fired with ambition, clicks as an actor and writer on Amateur Night.

Meanwhile, Val Barton has won an appointment in a school on Staten Island, where the illiterate, naive Lily can have the little white house of her dreams. Where she can cook, sew, garden and entertain the minister at dinner. But, realizing that Val and daughter Carlo really want the glamor and excitement of small-time theatres, she sacrifices her own hopes to theirs.

Miss Page gives a remarkable performance. She has terrific emotional appeal. She has technique, and knows how to conceal it. We predict that she will become the toast of the town, that she will win most of the plaques and medals annually bestowed on young players.

* * *

MARK STEVENS, as Val, is also making his Broadway bow. As he has won acclaim in films, his ability comes as no surprise to some of us. He acts the intellectual young husband, fascinated by the stage, with ingratiating simplicity, conviction and feeling. And Ben Hecht's nine-year-old daughter, Jenny, is completely winning as their precocious child.

Edgar Stehli, Vicki Cummings, Howard Smith, Suzanne Caubaye, Robert Emmett and Paul Andor are excellent in other roles.

"Mid-Summer" is no literary masterpiece. It rambles a little, and some of its dialogue is less than eloquent. But it has great heart. It has tenderness and humor. It catches beautifully the mood of an era. An era when vaudeville flourished. When drab boarding-houses were filled with actors. When hope sprang eternal.

* * *

SO, "MID-SUMMER'S" faults are really negligible. We loved every minute of it. We felt like violating critical tradition by joining our fellow first-nighters in cheering. We recommend it to you for an absorbing, irresistible, heartwarming evening in the theatre.

"Mid-Summer" is a hit, in our book. We advise you to buy your tickets for it immediately.

New York Post

January 22, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Arrival of Geraldine Page

This girl, Geraldine Page is an actress! For quite some time, rumors have been coming out of Greenwich Village concerning the miracles being wrought there over the body of Tennessee Williams' "Summer and Smoke" by an unknown performer in the field called, perhaps somewhat patronizingly, "off-Broadway," and a lot of us, who are skeptics about the theatrical activities in that mysterious district, were inclined to doubt what we heard. We were wrong. I saw Miss Page in Vina Delmar's "Mid-Summer" at the Vanderbilt last night, and she is wonderful.

I don't dismiss the new play altogether, either. It has its weaknesses, and there were times when the more erudite old-timers feared it was going to turn into "The Easiest Way," but it also has some excellent scenes, some freshly observed characters and considerable vividness of background and viewpoint. This, however, is the year in which the players tend to be more interesting than their plays, and what gives "Mid-Summer" its imperative call on your attention is that it has a role for Geraldine Page and she acts it superbly.

New Star

Certainly, not since Julie Harris, has a new actress shown the signs of current achievement and magnificent, endless promise that Miss Page brings to the American theater. To those of us who have seen a lot of famous actresses in our time, she has a way of recalling various disparate players, even including Julie Haydon and ZaSu Pitts, but it would be wildly unfair to you and her to suggest that there was anything imitative about the new star, as I don't mind calling her. She has a distinctive quality of her own, and it is a notable one.

To those who have the fantastic suspicion that critics praise new actresses only when they are beautiful, I must add, perhaps impolitely, that Miss Page, like most distinguished feminine players, is not going to be given ecstatic notices for any such quality. Again like most distinguished feminine players, however, it is a little hard to recall this when you are watching her in action. A lanky, rather gangling girl of pleasant appearance, she is appearing as the gawky wife of a young teacher who wants to act in vaudeville, and she knows how to make the woman virtually lyric.

The Play

"Mid-Summer," which takes place in a dubious New York hotel in 1907, is concerned with the unsuccessful attempt of the wife to make her husband give up acting to go back to teaching. It has some original minor characters, a brilliant scene between the wife, her precocious daughter and a surprised minister, and there is a superb comic line, involving, of all people, President Millard Fillmore, but it does go to pieces a bit in the second act. What is important is that Miss Page keeps it alive, moving and even fresh by her honest, deeply touching, quietly humorous, entirely original and completely distinguished performance.

The other portrayals are also good. Ben Hecht's little daughter, Jenny, is more terrifying than the child monster in "The Children's Hour" as the learned and sophisticated infant, and Mark Stevens as the husband, Vicki Cummings as a well-kept friend, and Suzanne Caubaye and Paul Andor as the French hotel keepers are admirably in character. And it is a sign of the conspicuous waste in the American theater that Howard Smith, one of the ablest of contemporary actors, has just one scene as a vulgar rich man. Paul Crabtree has directed ably. But one has to come back to Geraldine Page, who belongs in the company of Shirley Booth and Julie Harris.

"The Bat"

Daily Mirror

January 21, 1953

'The Bat' A Lively Whodunit For Mystery Fans

By ROBERT COLEMAN

James Withers Elliott decided that it was about time to give the public another old-fashioned, rip-roaring whodunit. So, unable to find one of modern vintage, he revived that wonderful museum piece, "The Bat." If it failed to thrill the sophisticated first-nighters at the National last evening, it certainly did give them a lot of laughs.

Elliott is a veteran with chiller-dillers, having presented "The Gorilla" some years ago. Thinking nostalgically about it, he must have weighed the possibilities of a revival, before switching to "The Bat." The latter, be it reported, established something of a long-run record back in 1920.

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"THE BAT" is a more sedate mystery drama than "The Gorilla," which featured a huge ape that ran through the audience pawing at the customers, and a couple of what us old-timers considered very funny hoke detectives. "The Bat" has a detective, too, but he's no comedian.

It relies heavily upon lights that flicker out when thunder roars, sliding panels and shrieks in the dark. And it has a farcical maid, such as May Vokes used to play every couple of seasons. In this instance, the comedy is in the fluttery but highly skilled hands of Zasu Pitts.

Zasu rolled her amazing eyes, wriggled her fabulous arms and let out some piercing squawks that had her admirers howling gleefully. Lucile Watson, a really distinguished actress, dominated the evening for us with her artistry. Elliott was fortunate, indeed, in persuading her to essay the aristocratic and intelligent lady who rented a haunted house.

SHEPPERD STRUDWICK, Harry Bannister, Harry Shaw Lowe, Bert Bertram, Peter Hanson, Paula Houston, Laurence Haddon, Charles Proctor and Raymond Bailey also participated in the zany didoes.

Director Jonathan Seymour didn't get all out of "The Bat" that he might have. He set a rather slow pace, and several of the actors seemed a little unsure of themselves. This was probably due to last-minute cast changes and limited rehearsals, because of the difficulty in obtaining a theatre.

However, the resourceful Miss Watson pulled the company together as the show progressed. The performance had the virtue of becoming better with each act. The suspense mounted, but not very high.

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AS A SENTIMENTAL aficionado of vintage melodramas, we had fun at "The Bat." And the majority of the opening-night audience appeared to share our enjoyment of the historic hit. We had even forgotten the plot, so joined the Johnny-come-latelies in trying to single out heroes from villains.

A lot of playgoers, who caught "The Bat" when it first reached Broadway, will probably want to see it again. And many juveniles may want a glimpse at what made their parents' spines tingle. The youngsters will certainly profit by studying Miss Watson's authoritative acting style, even in so creaky a vehicle.

Ralph Alswang has designed a handsome and eerie production.

A word of warning: You'll get no more from the Mary Roberts Rinehart-Avery Hopwood shenanigans than you bring to them. You have to be a real mystery fan to get your money's worth.

"THE BAT"

Mystery drama by Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood; staged by Jonathan Seymour; settings by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Alice Gibson; presented by James Withers Elliott at the National Theatre, January 20, 1953. The cast:

Miss Cornelia Van Gorder... Lucile Watson
Billy..... Harry Shaw Lowe
Lizzie..... Zasu Pitts
A Stranger..... Bert Bertram
Brooks..... Peter Hanson
Miss Dale Ogden.. Paula Houston
Doctor Wells.. Harry Bannister
Anderson... Shepperd Strudwick
Richard Fleming..... Laurence Haddon
Reginald Beresford..... Charles Proctor
An Unknown Man..... Raymond Bailey

New York Herald Tribune

January 21, 1953

'The Bat'

By WALTER F. KERR

AT A tender age I fell in love with "The Bat" and pursued it through every existing stock company in the Chicago area. In the heat of my passion, I saw it thirteen times. Tuesday's revival at the National made it fourteen. But this is—I say it in sorrow—the end of the affair.

Not that some old embers weren't stirred last evening. As the curtain went up on Ralph Alswang's rich, red-brown room with its winding staircase, as the wall-lamps flickered wildly and everyone scurried for candles, and as the property-man obliged with a splendid staccato of offstage thunder and lightning, a whole gaudy era of innocent, mysterious nonsense seemed possible once more.

And there were moments later on in the proceedings when the giddy paraphernalia of sliding panels, disappearing corpses, bloody hands clutching at draperies, and bats silhouetted against window panes seemed about to capture a foolish, old-fashioned charm of their own.

• • •

Producer James Withers Elliott has done some pleasant casting. He has persuaded Lucile Watson to tackle that tough-minded spinster, Cornelia Van Gordon, and as long as Miss Watson is squinting through sharp eyes, pulling dubiously at her lower lip, and keeping one chess move ahead of a household of frightened and devious conspirators, this thriller of 1920 takes on surprising humor and authority.

Zasu Pitts is on stage a lot, too—she is cast as a housemaid called Lizzie—and she puts those familiar, fluttering hands to good use as she shies away from a ouija board, creeps waveringly down a darkened staircase, or spins halfway across the stage at the sound of the latest shrill scream. (It must be noted in passing, though, that she is utterly unable to do anything with a bit of period farce involving a meat cleaver and that standard Japanese manservant.)

But for all the talent that has been corralled, and for all the affection that die-hard devotees of the Mary Roberts Rinehart school of detective fiction can bring it, "The Bat" remains a theatrical curio. As such, it needs a defined sense of style, some sort of attack that will set it gently, impishly, or even mockingly in a clear environment—the kind of conscious caper that Joshua Logan and Jose Ferrer were able to make of "Charley's Aunt."

• • •

As Jonathan Seymour has staged it at the National, it isn't quite genuine and it isn't quite a lark. The first act makes a bold and barefaced try for straight tension. The second gets cluttered up in badly timed dashes through a dozen handy exits and a spate of loose low comedy which has no point of view at all. The third act goes to pieces in a welter of sloppy, but still straight-faced, mechanics so ineptly executed—at one point no less than four shadowed figures crawl in the same window and dart out the same door in quick succession—as to reduce the audience to a not wholly intended hilarity.

In addition, Paula Houston and Peter Hanson, as the fugitive young lovers of the piece, do nothing to rescue their heavily expository dialogue from the bare-bones feeling that has overtaken it after all these years. And Mrs. Rinehart has herself—to my personal horror—tinkered with the ending, taking that last juicy spotlight away from the imperious Miss Van Gorder ("I have just told the first lie of an otherwise stainless career"—I once had the whole thing memorized) and giving it to the ubiquitous, and not really deserving, Lizzie.

The thrill is gone.

The New York Times

January 21, 1953

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Like a lot of old bats that hang around this town, "The Bat" that Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood wrote in 1920 has some funny moments. With Lucile Watson scowling at everyone imperiously and ZaSu Pitts bellowing and waving her hands, it opened at the National last evening, looking every bit 33 years of age but still in good humor. Although the writing creaks, the plot is as fresh as an algebraic equation.

In 1920 were playgoers frightened by it as well as amused? Did The Bat make their hair stand on end? If so, the current reincarnation has lost something. For the writing is hackneyed now, perhaps because so many other mystery shows have copied the old formula.

It begins with a thunder storm, flickering lights, an oriental butler, a scream, shrieking wind and the furtive glimpse of a man at the window. You could hardly collect more hokum than that in one place today even if The Thing were the villain. All the hokum the authors did not crowd into this opening scene they distribute through the rest of the evening. There is even a secret room with a sliding panel in the last act, to say nothing of bodies here and there, fresh blood on the carpet and a man with one side of his head pushed in.

* * *

But the innocence of "The Bat" is a point in its favor, and the extravagance of the last act is hilarious. Like the vaudeville sketches set in a room with several doors, the last act settles down to a steeplechase of murderers, thieves, detectives and suspects coming in by the window and racing out by the door, the dramatic situation changing with every entrance and exit.

A note in the program says: "The management requests audiences not to divulge the solution of the mystery." THE TIMES' lips are sealed. But the identity of The Bat is less relevant than the leisurely make-believe of this old-fashioned stage piece. The closer it gets to terror, the funnier it becomes.

Miss Watson and Miss Pitts are wonderful. As the scornful dowager turned detective, Miss Watson sweeps through the old lumber-room with grandeur. She bites off the head of anyone who gets in her way—decisive and regal, cool when everyone else is excited, certain when everyone else is confused. Miss Watson is an economical actress who puts nothing unessential into a role. Whenever she makes a remark you can be sure that it is final.

* * *

As the jittery maid servant—the part that May Vokes originated—Miss Pitts is consistently funny. She plays it in a key of comic terror—shrieking at the right moment, moving her hands around in nervous confusion, always alert, always foolish. Under Jonathan Seymour's routine direction, the other actors give routine performances. Shepperd Strudwick and Harry Bannister have not yet recovered from the long, dull grind of "Affairs of State" where they plodded their patient way through a different kind of hokum month after month.

If the general performance were livelier, however, "The Bat" might not be amusing at all. For the most disarming thing about it is the frankness with which it recalls the innocent enjoyment of the theatre three decades ago.

New York World-Telegram and The ~~Sun~~ Sun

January 21, 1953

The Bat' Still Packs 1920 Punch

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Bat" first swooped out of the dark and scared the daylights out of its public in 1920. It set a popular trend that quickly devoured its originality. Yet it went on through the years as a stock favorite, outlasting its carbon copies.

Now in its Broadway revival, you can see why. It is mechanically expert. Its complexities are dizzy but diverting. Despite its portliness, it still gets hysterically funny in the last act.

"The Bat" is a product of a time when psychological explanations for characters and their deeds were not emphasized in the theater. It is first a shock, then a relief, to find this play pure story. The characters are types, elaborated on as personalities only as much as is absolutely necessary to hold the plot together.

Maze of Plot.

And this plot is a dazzling maze. It tells of a bank robber whose loot is hidden somewhere in a house rented by an elderly lady for the summer. Her maid is light-headed and her niece is conveniently in love with the missing cashier blamed for the robbery.

The network of facts continues like that, as murders, screams, bloody hands and secret rooms are added. It happens on a wildly stormy night, with the electric lights frequently going off. For seasoning the criminal every once in a while introduces a picture or a reflection of a Bat.

In one sense this becomes more of a challenge than a thriller. The story defies you to keep abreast of its progress unless you listen to every word. This is more concentrated entertainment than the actual shivers you experience.

Quick Solutions.

Then in the third act it all goes mad. The action seems to overlap itself. The characters rush in and out, up ladders, out of closets and through secret panels. The story doubles its excitement with speed and new ideas, as the old puzzles are cleared up. And the solution comes barely ahead of the final curtain.

The reliance on pure story telling, rather than character, might have been a serious hindrance in the revival if it had not been for the stalwart grandeur of Lucile Watson's playing as the head tenant of the haunted house. Sure as usual with her comedy lines, she treats the play perfectly seriously and gives every maneuver of it strength.

ZaSu Pitts as the hare-brained servant relies on her familiar creepy hand mannerisms to illustrate her broad comedy lines and gets the same laughs she has been used to for so long. Shepperd Strudwick and Harry Bannister bring the same sort of intensity to the performance that Miss Watson employs, to force importance on the imaginative course of the plot.

Harry Shaw Lowe is ominous as a Japanese butler, and Paula Houston plays what is probably the most irritatingly feminine heroine of all theater literature.

DAILY NEWS

January 21, 1953

'The Bat,' an Old Chiller, Squeaks Somewhat in a Pleasant Revival

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I'm not any braver than I was in 1920—not even one-fourth as courageous, I'd guess—but somehow I don't scare as easily. "The Bat," which once chilled the marrow of my soft young bones, was revived at the National Theatre last evening, and it didn't seem to increase the congestion in my age-hardened arteries.

It did, however, give me a pleasant feeling—which is nothing to be sneezed at in today's theatre. The plot, by Mary Roberts Rinehart and the late Avery Hopwood, was a soundly made comedy-melodrama, and last evening I was happy to see it performed again by a good cast. But occasionally I was laughing at it rather than with it, and thinking it might go better as a beer-and-pretzels revival in a prohibition music-hall, if we could only get prohibition back again.

Some Good Actors.

James Withers Elliott's production of "The Bat" is excellent. There are two fine sets by Ralph Alswang, with alswanging doors, eerie lighting effects and secret panels. And there are a number of good actors, including grand Lucile Watson as the elderly tenant of a creepy house, Paula Houston as a handsome ingenue, Harry Bannister as a sinister physician, Sheppard Strudwick as a detective and Harry Shaw Lowe as a very Oriental manservant.

Miss Pitts Delights.

Then, of course, there is ZaSu Pitts as the screeching maid. I think Miss Pitts is every bit as good and funny as May Vokes was in this role in 1920. Her wails, tremors and complaints are delightful, and she is one comedienne from Hollywood whom I always like to see.

Since not every purchaser of this newspaper was hanging around the theatre in 1920, I should inform newcomers that "The Bat" is a melodrama about a house in which $400,000 worth of bank funds may have been hidden in a secret room, if there is a secret room. An elusive character called the Bat is trying to frighten Miss Watson out of her lease, but Miss Watson is not the type of old lady to be intimidated. She leaves all that stuff to her maid, Miss Pitts.